GEELONG NATURALIST

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COMING EVENTS

MAR	5	General Meeting	Fungi — Tom May
	9–11	VFNCA Campout Rowsley	
	12	Plant Group	Workshop
	17	Excursion	Otways: Fungi Hunt — Leaders: Claire Greenwell & Ade Foster
	19	Bird Group	Birding in Ecuador — Margaret Cameron
	21	Mid-week Bird Group Excursion	Edwards Point
	26	Biodiversity Group	Workshop
APRIL	2	Annual General Meeting	Members' night
	9	Plant Group	Workshop
	16	Bird Group	Which of our birds are in trouble? — Marilyn Hewish
	18	Mid-week Bird Excursion	'Ingleby' near Winchelsea — Leader: Kay Campbell
	21	Excursion	Alcoa Wetlands & Reedy Lake — Leader: Margaret Cameron
	23	Biodiversity Group	Workshop

The Club Website & home page are up & functioning again!

N.B. New address ...

GFNC Web page http://home.vicnet.au/~gfnc/

No email address please use email addresses of committee members on the back page

CLUB EXCURSION – 17 MARCH 2002

FUNGI HUNT MYSTERY TOUR

Leaders Claire Greenwell and Ade Foster
Departure
9.00 am Leave from Clairvaux Catholic School, Reynolds Road, Belmont

Claire and Ade hopefully will have found sites during the previous week. fFngi being fickle by nature, are dependent on rain and some warmth, so it is impossible to predict where to find them a month in advance.

Bring morning tea and lunch, plus protective clothing to suit the weather.

NEWS BITES!

- A new revised edition of *The Alps in Flower* by Ian McCann has been released by the Victorian National Parks Association at a cost of $15.95. Please see Ray Baverstock if you are interested in purchasing one.
- Members attending the February General Meeting were advised by our Treasurer that the Committee does not recommend any increase of Membership Subscriptions this year. The Treasurer will move a formal motion to adopt this recommendation tonight. Please remember that your subscription is due for renewal at the April meeting.
- Don't forget to have a look at our internet web page — find the address on the bottom of the inside cover.
- Seaview Park Friends Group will now be included as a GFNC subgroup (along similar lines to the Jerringot Group) as most members are already GFNC members.
- Coastal Litter Forums, protecting our valuable resources, invite free participation. The nearest venue is Surf Life Saving Club, upstairs lounge Surf Beach Drive, Torquay on Thursday 14 March. Registration is essential for catering — RSVP date 6 March. Contact: Jan Bayley phone 9509 7858 fax 9509 0774 or email JanBayley@msn.com.au

Enquiries: Karen Cosson EcoRecycle Ph. 9653 6943

Errata:
Vol. 37 No. 9

- page 4 — Introduction to February Diary — 'Wander Time' should read 'Wanderer Time'
- Page 4 — Plant Group Report — 2nd paragraph — 'Quite pleased...' should read 'Quite pleasant...'
- page 5 — A Closer Look at Saw-sedge — last paragraph — '5–100 mm' should read '5–100 µ'

The Editor apologises to contributors and members.

Members are invited to a presentation of the Ecological Burn Strategy for the Brisbane Ranges National Park by Chris Lindorff at the Anakie Depot at 1.00 pm on 17 March, 2002
(Unfortunately, this also clashes with our Club Excursion mentioned above.)

Our speaker tonight will be Dr Tom May.

Tom is a Senior Mycologist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, where his research interests include taxonomy, ecology and conservation of Australian fungi. He has had a long involvement with the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, and was Club President from 1998–2001. Tom helped to found the Australasian Mycological Society and the Fungimap scheme. He is currently Convenor of Fungimap, a community-based mapping scheme for Australian fungi.

We welcome new member Mrs Inge Davies to the Club and wish her a long and happy association.

The next meeting is the Annual General Meeting and is always a members' night.

Committee Nomination Forms are on page 7.

For more notices... see pages 3,7,8,9 12 & 14

OUT AND ABOUT

...Valda Dedman

After the storms, the soil was moist and the crickets came up the cracks in the black basalt soil, so the ibis moved into the paddocks at Pollocksford for a feast. Straw-necked Ibis have bare black scrawny necks, but the iridescent pink, blue and green sheen in the dark shoulder feathers makes up for any suggestion of ugliness. Worth a closer look.

Other observations from the car: a line up of Starlings on telephone wires, hundreds and hundreds of Little Ravens in a paddock, a dead fox on the bitumen, five Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flying inland from the dunes near the wind generator at Black Rock, a Brown Falcon watching and waiting.

European settlement has changed the face of the countryside. A study by Ecology Australia for the City of Greater Geelong has found that although our region has tremendous biodiversity, only about 5% of original flora cover remains and the remnant sites are highly fragmented.

There were 1804 plant species recorded, but only 62% are indigenous and of these 72% are regionally rare, vulnerable, endangered, extinct or poorly known. A sorry record, indeed. Many of the significant vegetation communities are on roadsides, which calls for protective management strategies. 188 environmental weed species were found, 64 of which are seriously invasive. Vertebrate fauna species (excluding marine fish) total 472 and 5% of these are exotic or introduced.

'Numerous plant and animal species have become extinct in the municipality and many more face extinction without intervention, being reduced to a few small at-risk populations... Without active protection and management most existing flora and fauna will be lost over time.'

Could the GFNC 'adopt' one of the at-risk species and help to save it from extinction? It could be an exciting project. There will be at least two months' opportunity to comment on the Council's Draft Biodiversity Management Plan resulting from the study.

Seaview Park, a tiny area on the Belmont escarpment, once an ancient shoreline, contains unexpected coastal plants, which are of regional significance as well as many remnant grassland plants which are locally significant. The coastal form of Wirilda Wattle *Acacia retinodes var. uncifolia*, occurs in Victoria only from Geelong to Wilson's Promontory. This plant was collected on the Bellarine Peninsula in May 1802 by Robert Brown, botanist with Matthew Flinders' expedition.

The apparently ordinary grassland paddock in Shell Road, just to the north of Geelong Grammar School also holds a few surprises. The best is probably the spectacular fluffy white Feather-heads *Ptilotis macrocephalus*, but at the end of November last year there were also large patches of Pink Bindweed and Milk Beauty-heads, Bluebells and Blue Devils.

What is a rare plant? Some have always been rare, some have become so, perhaps without anyone noticing, like Austral Ladies' Tresses. The Small Scurf-Pea *Cullen parvum* was once common round Geelong, at Lara, for example. Its demise has meant that the Chequered Swallowtail Butterfly *Papilio demoleus sthenelus* has also become uncommon here because its larvae feed on cullen plants, which are plains grassland species.

Check out the Viridans website www.viridans.com.au for more rare plants, as well as animals and butterflies. According to City of Greater Geelong Council minutes (12/2/02) there is to be a CD-Rom *Wild Geelong* of the district's flora and fauna. I am really looking forward to that!

Horn of Plenty or Trumpet of Death? The Fungimap CD-Rom helped me to identify *Craterellus cornucopioides*, the fungus we found at Melba Gully, among the litter on a tree root. Funereal in aspect, it is a dark grey to black funnel with a fluted rim on a grey stem. It is a cosmopolitan fungus that is cooked and eaten in Europe or dried and powdered for use as a flavouring. It also occurs in eastern North America and in Panama.

Melba Gully was a magical place, cool and restful. Tree ferns, ground ferns and filmy ferns among the moss on tree trunks. A trickling stream. Purple slugs under rocks, spider webs and leafy carpets. A place to revisit.

At the edge of the Point Addis carpark huge dark-coloured spider wasps with wings folded along the body were dashing in and out of burrows in the sandy soil. Each was going to a separate chamber underground, where a paralysed spider was probably stored as food later on for emergent wasp larvae.

Coast Beard-heath *Leucopogon parviflorus* and Prickly Currant Bush *Coprosma quadrifida* have had a fine fruit crop this summer. These berries are edible and I much prefer the shiny red 'currants' which are sweeter and juicier and lack the large seed of the beard heath. It would take a long time to gather enough for a meal, but they provide a good vitamin supplement. *Leucopogon* did however save the French botanist Riche when he was lost for 54 hours on the coast of South Australia in 1792.

MARCH DIARY

...Joe Hubbard

Seeing red; a well-endowed wasp; the first fungus; bird games; a fantail up your nose; a wheely big web; autumn orchids.

7.03.01 Newtown
Today Melbourne Botanic Gardens announced the introduction of a scarlet wattle bred from a lone wild specimen which is now dead.

Interesting! Last September I found an orange wattle, or rather one with globular flower heads yellow on red, which gave the orange effect. It looked rather like the Hedge Wattle with which it was growing.

Outdoors, albeit briefly, I saw a tiny butterfly which paused for a moment on a shrub by the back door. At rest its wings were a lovely polished copper. Got the camera — gone!

Started to search the garden — distracted by the Grass Dart Butterflies — just about the right size for the copper. No luck!

But I found a Gasteruptiid Wasp, looked weird, seemed to be all ovipositor. I watched it as it disappeared into the hollow centre of a bamboo stake, no doubt in search of some creature to parasitise.

14.03.01 Newtown
Thought it was a small butterfly but when it landed — wings held flat on the body — obviously a day flying moth, or ...

Covered with tiny orange and black dots and patches, sprinkled with these. Something in back of mind tells me we called these Salt and Pepper moths when we were kids.

Hand watering in the back corner and disturbed the Song Thrush — quite tame — flew up to the fence, keeping an eye on its shrubbery.

16.03.01 Newtown
First fungus for autumn in the backyard. A few centimetres high with white stem, a 20 cent size grey cap, fragile — a breeze would excite it. You must be up early to see it — in sunlight it wilts and disappears.

25.03.01
An Imperial White Butterfly did a languid circuit of the garden — chased off by a Cabbage White. Later watched 2 Australian Admirals playing chasey — a mating game or a territorial squabble?

About 20 Silvereyes were using the birdbath — had a great time plunging in and doing the wing-stroke — more like a relay — they had to take turns. Most had rufous flanks which our summer visitors don't have. Sometimes there seems to be a mix of these but the paler flanks are the ones which nest regularly in the garden.

26.03.01 Barwon River
We turned the corner and were besieged by Grey Fantails — or so it seemed. There had to be about twenty, busy catching low flying insects and hawking right up to the observer's nose. This had to the movement of Fantails one comes to expect. But we looked in vain for a Rufous one.

30.03.01 Newtown
An enterprising spider has built its wheel web (a Master Weaver!) between the television aerial and roof. Noticed the web in daylight — quite intact in spite of the flying birds. Spotlit — there waiting in the dark for its prey was a large spider which looked white in the light.

31.03.01 Anglesea
'What would be flowering now?' 'Well, Parson's Bands and ...' 'And what is this?' Val had found a Bearded Midge Orchid, one of the orchids I had on the tip of my tongue. This was the morning of the tiny orchids — all hard to see. We found two species of Midge Orchids, some white Parson's Orchids and a Red-tip Greenhood. Also flowering was a grass and some sort of rush or sedge — both attractive in their own right.

Surprised to find Ironbarks flowering – that means plenty of honeyeaters.

A lot of female Common Brown butterflies — much larger and more colourful than the males — and one Klug's Xenica, male, which could be mistaken for a male Common Brown.

A small flock of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flew low overhead and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were numerous. We were seeing their movement along the coast.

Cheers!

PLANT GROUP

...Dick Southcombe

A number of coastal plants including grasses, heaths, wattles and teatrees were discussed at our February meeting, but those creating the most interest were the 'usually considered coastal' plants which grow on the Belmont Escarpment at Seaview Park.

Of the fourteen regionally significant species recorded for Seaview Park, there are six which are usually considered coastal; our attention focused on Small Bush-pea *Pultenaea tenuifolia*, Coast Fan-flower *Scaevola albida* (a variable species), Coast Wirilda *Acacia retinodes* var. *uncifolia* and a Twin-leaf *Zygophyllum* sp. (taxonomy unresolved). These plants will be studied in more detail when they are in flower.

March meeting.
Members to bring a variety of specimens for study.

FYANSFORD COMMON/BARWON RIVER
Half Day Excursion
19 January, 2002

...Ray Baverstock

On a warm sunny morning 11 members met at the Fyansford Information Centre for a short ramble along the banks of the Moorabool River. We drove down to the lower carpark to save time. This is beside the intake channel which used to supply water for the power station at the Cement Works. The power station was closed many years ago and the channel now contains a number of aquatic plants. From here we could see the 'Island' which is to become part of the Buckley Falls Park. The walk proved more rewarding than expected, with around 25 species of birds observed, including Reed Warbler, Cormorant, Tree Martin and some brightly coloured Goldfinches.

We saw the anabranch of the river down which water flows from the Barwon to the Moorabool in times of flood thus creating the 'Island.'

We walked as far as the foot bridge leading to Lower Paper Mill Road, returning to the cars via the paved walking track.

The Common itself has been well maintained by the council and tree planting over the years has enhanced what was once a rather barren landscape. I can recall as a child seeing some local residents using the Common for grazing their house cows.

We then moved to the car park in Upper Paper Mill Road above the old Paper Mill on the north side of the Barwon River. A short walk down hill took us to the water race which used to supply the Mill. From the foot bridge straddling the race, we could see the remains of Highetts Mill on the south bank and traces of the water race which supplied it. Five or six Pacific Black Ducks were seen here.

A fortnight earlier my Grandson Kieran had seen a Platypus swimming near a rock in the middle of the river and I was able to confirm his sighting. Our co-leader, Valda, mentioned that five Platypus had been trapped recently and released into this section of the river. I have heard of similar numbers of Platypus being sighted further upstream at Stonehaven.

A bird sitting on a rock in the middle of the river caught our attention. We concluded that it was a wader, probably a Common Sandpiper but could not positively identify it before it flew upstream.

Moving further upstream, we admired the indigenous plantings of trees and shrubs. Here Dave King sighted a number of butterflies but apart from one or two rabbits, no animals were found.

The bird list was added to with a Great Egret which landed in a tree on the south bank, numbers of White Ibis, Moorhens, a White-faced Heron and a Rufous Night Heron. Overall more species were sighted than on the Moorabool River.

Passing a couple of disused quarry sites, we eventually reached Baum Weir. Dave sighted a Pacific Black Duck in the river with nine ducklings.

My Father and I used to fish this section of the river over fifty years ago, but what used to be a barren landscape with Boxthorn and bare paddocks has been transformed into a place of beauty.

The restored water race is here much wider than the original, but this only adds to its attraction.

The councils, the Friends of Buckley Falls Park and especially Tony Wolford, without whose drive and dedication this project would not have taken place, deserve to be congratulated.

If you have not done so recently, make sure you visit this area.

Invertebrate List

...Dave King

Cabbage White Butterfly	Common	*Pieris rapae rapae*
Meadow Argus Butterfly	Few	*Junonia villida calybe*
Common Brown Butterfly	Few	*Heteronympha merope merope*
Painted Lady Butterfly	Few	*Vanessa kershawi*
Cicada	Few	Only heard
Flower Wasp	Several	*Scolliidae*
Retreat of a spider made by twisting of leaf tip	One	*Clubiona* sp. Spider not present

Fyansford Common/Barwon River Excursion 19 January 2002

Bird List

...Valda Dedman

SPECIES	Moorabool	Barwon	COMMENTS
Pacific Black Duck	*	*	With 9 young at Baum weir
Little Black Cormorant	3	1	Perched in dead tree at Moorabool River
Little Pied Cormorant		*	
Great Egret		1	Near Baum Weir, flew to treetop
White-faced Heron		1	Walked along edge of Baum's Weir
Rufous Night Heron		1	Flew into pine tree
Australian White Ibis		7	On rocks, flew around, dirty plumage
Nankeen Kestrel		1	
Brown Falcon		1	Flying overhead
Dusky Moorhen		3	Nest with 1 chick near Baum Weir
Eurasian Coot		*	
Masked Lapwing		2	On rocks
Spotted Turtle-Dove	*	*	
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	1		Perched low in tree beside river
Galah	2		Flew across river
Red-rumped Parrot	*		One juvenile, several adults
Superb Fairy-wren	*	*	Numerous, one carrying food
Red Wattlebird	*	*	Several
White-plumed Honeyeater	*	*	Several
New Holland Honeyeater	*		
Grey Shrike-thrush	*		Heard
Grey Fantail		*	
Willie Wagtail	*	*	Common
Magpie-lark	*		
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike		1	
Australian Magpie	*	*	
Little Raven	*	*	
Red-browed Finch		*	
House Sparrow	*	*	
European Goldfinch	*	*	Several immature at Moorabool River
European Greenfinch	*	*	
Welcome Swallow	*	*	
Tree Martin	*		
Clamorous Reed-Warbler	*	*	
Little Grassbird	*	*	
Common Starling	*	*	
Common Myna	*		
Unidentified Wader		1	On rock in middle of river, flew upstream

BIRDS BEFORE BREAKFAST
7 February 2002

...Valda Dedman

Six thirty a.m. and sunrise casts a pink glow over the waters of Jerringot. The Chestnut and Grey Teal are still sleepy, motionless pairs on top of the nest boxes. By 7 o'clock, there are nearly fifty people milling around the bird hide, waiting to start a Birds Before Breakfast walk.

The birds are awake now, wrens chittering in the bushes and Magpie Larks 'peeweeing' out on the golf course. We walk along the cycle track, too many of us for the Buff-banded Rail to scuttle across the path. Dave King volunteers to get wet in the long grass to put up some snipe, which rise with a *krek* in ones and twos. Purple Swamphens vanish into the reed clumps.

Across in the large, damp wetland on the edge of the golf course there is a Black-winged Stilt, an uncommon visitor. We admire its long red legs and crisp black and white colours. There are lots of Willie Wagtails and Magpie Larks, and a number of Masked Lapwings feeding on the fairways. They fly over to Jerringot to join another large group on the central island. Black Ducks and Dusky Moorhens are there too.

The Welcome Swallows are flying high, sign of a fine day, when their insect food is also high-flying.

Spotted Turtledoves are picking up stray seed on the track ahead. Sparrows are all we can find in the ugliness of the council depot, so we turn our backs on them to look at a group of Red-rumped Parrots feeding noisily in a eucalypt at the edge of the fairways. Red Wattlebirds and New Holland Honeyeaters are moving about the trees, too. There are a couple of Silver Gulls on the greens, as usual.

A group of Australasian Grebes swims among the Azolla on a little wetland on the golf course. Two of them are fluffy young. They have left their floating nest and will stay with the adults for months. A Grey Butcherbird sits on an old fence post.

A Yellow-billed Spoonbill, long legs trailing, flies off to the south. We notice Ibis overhead, too, both White and Straw-necked.

Out on the grass we see parties of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, and Red-browed Finches and Superb Fairy-wrens, all active little birds.

As we return, there is a White-faced Heron now in the middle of the big 'Growling Grass-frog' wetland and a Black-fronted Dotterel. As we come past the wetland where the Baillon's Crake breed, Latham's Snipe rise up almost at our feet. They had flown up earlier from the adjoining wetland, whose low water level suits them at the end of summer. These two wetlands at the edge of the golf course are really part of the Jerringot system and should be managed for their wildlife values as part of the Jerringot Wildlife Reserve.

We hear about the Kookaburras which have nested in a hollow over near the river, but we don't have time to check them out. Breakfast is waiting.

After breakfast and the speeches accompanying the 'launching' of our new interpretive signage, when all is peaceful again and only two visitors from Melbourne linger to birdwatch, a Great Egret comes to the branch outside the bird hide. It stands in the sun and preens, a light wind ruffles the delicate plumes on its back. A fitting end to a great morning.

I would like to thank everyone who helped to make the event such a success, including the few who stayed behind and set up the breakfast site.
Photos were on the Internet next day thanks to Ade Foster. Visit our website http://home.vicnet.net.au/~gfnc/.

[Many thanks go to Valda for her time and dedication with this project!]

COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

Nominations for the 2002/2003 Committee are now being called for, and can be received by the Secretary until 8.00 pm Tuesday 2 April, 2002, the Annual General Meeting.

All positions become vacant each year.

To remind members of the GFNC Committee positions, they are as follows:

President
Vice President
Secretary
Minutes Secretary
Treasurer
Committee Members — 7, including Editor
Immediate Past President — ex officio position — no election necessary

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COMMITTEE NOMINATION FORM

I HEREBY NOMINATE .....Member of GFNC Inc

For the position of .....

On the Committee of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club Incorporated.

Signature of Proposer.....Member

Signature of Seconder.....Member

I ACCEPT NOMINATION FOR THE ABOVE POSITION

Signature of Nominee .....Date.....

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BARWON HEADS FESTIVAL of the SEA

Friends of the Bluff are again organising an exciting program of environment events and activities for 2002

These events are planned to provide an environment experience of the stunning array of coastal habitats at Barwon Heads — lakes and salt marsh, estuary and mangroves, tidal rockpools, woodlands, limestone cliffs and sand dunes.

CONNECTIONS WITH THE SEA — an all day seminar discussing (coastal processes) planning and management issues and how the community can be involved.
WED MARCH 13th 8.45 am – 4.30 pm 13th Beach SLSC
Bookings essential.

LAND SEA SKY — a community slide night with three expert speakers providing a snapshot of Barwon Heads from the land, sea sky.
WED MARCH 13th 7.30 pm Community Hall, Hitchcock Ave, Barwon Heads.
No Bookings Required.

SUSTAINABLE LIVING EXPO — a highlight of the Saturday Street Festival. This Expo aims to encourage the community to live sustainably and will provide information, referrals, demonstrations and services and products to be used in your family home – displays, speakers, theatre.
SATURDAY MARCH 16th 10 am – 4 pm Community Hall, Hitchcock Ave, Barwon Heads.
Any groups, companies or organisations wishing to exhibit at the Sustainable Living Expo please contact
Greg Burgess Ph: 03 5254 3348 or email: gregburg@tpg.com.au or
Antony Mangelsdorf Email: tarant @sunet.com.au

LAND SEA SKY EXPO — held on the Barwon Heads' foreshore. This expo will highlight the work and activities of local environment groups and management agencies – displays, theatre, food, music and heaps of vital information on our wonderful coast.
SUNDAY MARCH 17th 10 am onwards Barwon Heads foreshore, Jetty Rd, Barwon heads.

ENVIRO-ACTIVITIES — tons of great activities for the whole family — canoe the mangroves, rockpool rambles, discover the coast by boat, plane or foot, cultural walks, discover the Bluff, bird watching and much more.
Activities will run on SATURDAY and SUNDAY. Some activities require bookings.

Celebrate the diversity of our spectacular coastal environment at the BARWON HEADS FESTIVAL of the SEA during SEAWEEK 2002

MARCH 13th – 17th

For all enquiries:

Jon Duthie	Brian Gibbons
Ph. 5254 2626	5254 1262
lduthie@vtown.com.au	antipodes_hort@iprimus.com.au

Mid-week Bird Group Excursion Report Serendip Sanctuary, Lara 21 February, 2002

...Rhonda Jennings

Fourteen members met at Serendip Sanctuary where Vernon Cohen was our outing leader.

Vernon had been a voluntary worker at the sanctuary during its formative years. He spoke of the early history, the buildings and surrounds which was an interesting and informative start to our day.

It was a good choice of venue on a windy day. The tall trees along the pathways giving us shelter. The area has well defined paths and signs and some well placed bird hides.

Some of the day's highlights were Crested Shrike-tit, Plumed Whistling-Duck, close views of Rufous Night Heron and brown fluffy goslings which will go through many colour changes before having the black and white feathers of adult Magpie Geese.

Bird List
Emu
Magpie Goose
Plumed Whistling-Duck
Musk Duck
Black Swan
Cape Barren Goose
Australian Shelduck
Australian Wood Duck
Pacific Black Duck
Northern Shoveler
Grey Teal
Chestnut Teal
Pink-eared Duck
Hardhead
Australasian Grebe
Hoary-headed Grebe
Little Black Cormorant
Australian Pelican
White-faced Heron
Great Egret
Rufous Night Heron
Australian White Ibis
Straw-necked Ibis
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Whistling Kite
Brolga
Purple Swamphen
Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
Black-tailed Native-hen
Australian Bustard
Black-fronted Dotterel
Masked Lapwing
Crested Pigeon
Long-billed Corella
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Galah
Eastern Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot
Superb Fairy-wren
Red Wattlebird
White-plumed Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater
Crested Shrike-tit
Grey Shrike-thrush
Magpie Lark
Willie Wagtail
Australian Magpie
Little Raven
White-winged Chough
House Sparrow
European Goldfinch
Welcome Swallow
Common Starling
Common Blackbird

Birds seen in enclosed environments were:
Australian Ringneck
Bush Thick-knee
Tawney Frogmouth
Black-winged Stilt
Buff-banded Rail

Also seen were Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Pademelons which are a small hopping marsupial now found mainly in Tasmania.

NEXT MID-WEEK BIRD GROUP EXCURSION
Thursday, 21 March 2002

Edwards Point State Faunal Reserve, St Leonards

A mixture of woodland, beach and saltmarsh; so the chance of anything from fairy-wrens to waders.

Meet at Jerringot bird-hide, Belmont Common at 8.30 am **or** at the entrance to the Reserve in Beach Road, St Leonards at 9.15 am.

Finish about 1.30 pm.

The walk to the wader area is about 7 km return. There will be an opportunity to do a walk of 3.5 km. For the longer walk, you will need to carry a drink and snack.

Enquiries:
Polly Cutcliffe 5244 0182

Mammal Atlas

The Mammal Study Group is preparing an atlas of all species of mammals in the area covered by the Bird Group.

A record form is available tonight and if you are willing to help, please take a few with you. It is **all** mammals from possums to whales, bats to kangaroos.

Since we are starting from scratch, we need all sightings initially, not just rare or unusual ones. We will start retrospectively, i.e. from the start of year 2001, so last year's records too please.

Trevor Pescott for Mammal Study Group

Report of illustrated talk at the general meeting on 5 February 2002 given by Ron Waters on the subject of 'REPTILES AND THEIR HABITATS'

...Roy Whiteside

Ron is a zoologist who works for DNRE in the Port Phillip Region. He has had a life long interest in herpetology. His current work is mainly in the compliance area where he is involved in investigations of wildlife trafficking which mainly involves reptiles.

Objectives of this talk
To explain the interactions between reptiles and their selected habitats. Reference is made to some of the key biological principles involved in the selection of habitats. A number of key reptile habitats in the Geelong area are covered. Many of the photographs in this presentation were taken by Ron but some were extracted from the Web.

Reptiles are usually **chordates,** meaning that during development they have navel chords which form under the spinal chord. They are vertebrates with scales, which breath air and are **ecto-thermic** i.e. they need heat from outside sources to run their biological/biochemical processes, rather than from the combustion of food.

CHARACTERISTICS of AUSTRALIAN REPTILES

They belong to three main **ORDERS**:

SQUAMATA comprising **Snakes and Lizards**

CROCADILLIA comprising **Crocodiles**

TESTUDINIDAE comprising **turtles.** In Australia turtles are aquatic, the term **tortoise** being reserved for the true terrestrial tortoises of Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

In New Zealand there is the **Tuatara** which belongs to the order **RYNCHOCEPHALIA**.

Definition of HABITAT
Ron's definition is 'where the organism lives,' but more formally it is generally regarded as 'the structural living space which comprises inorganic elements such as soil, rock, minerals and water plus the associated vegetation.'

Location of reptiles around the Earth
They live practically everywhere, with the exception of extreme habitats like the polar regions, the deep sections of the oceans, very high altitudes and in the air. Apart from fish these extreme habitats are occupied by a few specialist mammals and birds. Birds and mammals have evolved from reptiles and a bird can be regarded as a feathered reptile.

Key biological features which affect choice of habitat
1 Thermo-regulation of body temperature at a level to enable bio-chemical processes to operate.

In general, reptiles do not generate heat for their body processes metabolically, i.e. they do not burn food. Heat, in most cases, is obtained externally either from the sun or other sources.

Body temperatures nearly always fluctuate with changes in external temperatures between day and night. One exception would apply to large crocodiles in the East Alligator River whose temperature would remain at an almost constant 30 degrees. These reptiles lie in the sun most of the day but can crawl into the river if they start to feel too hot. The large thermal mass ensures it will not lose or gain very much heat. In the case of mammals and birds, body heat is generated metabolically and in most cases remains close to constant. An exception to this is found in feather-tailed gliders and bats which in the middle of winter try to maintain energy reserves by allowing their temperature to decrease considerably. Another example is in hibernating bears which have a core temperature which is much less than their normal operating temperature.

A reptile chooses a habitat appropriate to its needs of temperature regulation so that it can regulate its body temperature behaviourally. In some cases it may be more important to lose heat rather than gain it. Heat from the environment can be gained from radiant heat directly from the sun or by conduction, e.g. from hot rocks.

Some reptiles lose water through their skin and mouth which allows cooling to occur through evaporated cooling.

Breeding **pythons** can maintain body temperatures up to seven degrees higher than ambient and they do that by generating heat metabolically. A **Carpet Python** curled around a clutch of eggs appears to shiver. In doing so, it is putting on a burst of glucose and by burning it, is raising its body temperature enough to maintain the eggs at a temperature where they will continue to develop.

2 Access to water
Reptiles do require water in varying degrees for survival. Some reptiles require constant access to high humidity and access to free water, others are much more adapted to arid conditions. They can lose water through urine and faeces. Some water can be lost through their skin, although it is relatively impervious to water compared with amphibians, and they can lose water through the lining of their mouth and they will lose more water at high temperatures and low humidity.

Some work done in 1965 on the **Peninsula Dragon** showed that, as the creature's body temperature increases, the rate of water loss also increases. Under dry air conditions this reptile finds it difficult to keep cool once the temperature reaches the mid thirties. Given a choice, most reptiles will select temperatures in the low thirties as a preferred maximum. Exceptions are **Black-headed Monitors** and **Desert Goannas** which can select body temperatures up to 47 degrees.
The **Bockadam** is an aquatic snake which is totally dependent on warm water for its thermo-regulation and food requirements. It would dehydrate rapidly if it were taken out of water.
Thorny Devils do not drink free standing water but they have a series of channels in their skin. They sit out in the morning dew and collect water in these channels and lap it up.

3 Shelter from predators
Almost every reptile in Victoria, with the exception of the **Lace Monitor,** has some natural predators. Shelter from the elements and predators is important and the sorts of refuge sites

they might need are rocks, logs, tussocks, leaf litter and holes in the ground. These shelter sites afford physical protection from predators but must also have special heating and insulating characteristics. Reptile habitats do not necessarily remain the same throughout the year.

A comprehensive study of **Diamond Pythons** on the east coast of NSW found that there were significant seasonal variations in the type of habitats that were selected by these snakes, so that in winter, sunny north-facing outcrops were selected because the snakes could just throw up a few coils out on the ledge to use the winter sun to raise their body temperature enough to be able to move around. A survey carried out in a Sydney suburb found that few people had seen Diamond Pythons in their neighbourhood even though they were extremely common.

4 Availability of food
For herbivorous species this means access to palatable species of plants which are low in fibre. **Iguanas** can cope with high fibre but the smaller local **Blue Tongue** and **Cunningham's skink** need high quality vegetable matter.
Carnivorous reptiles, of course, need prey species to be available.

Eastern Brown Snake
Recent studies on the venom of this species have shown that it is the second most toxic venom of any snake in the world. It is second only to the **Inland Taipan** and more toxic than the **Coastal Taipan.** Researchers have found that some susceptible people have died of heart failure within minutes of a bite of an **Eastern Brown Snake** since there is a type of cardio-toxin in the venom. We should not take these snakes for granted, but they almost always move away from you when disturbed. Experienced herpetologists have difficulty in observing this type of snake even when radio tagging shows that they are above ground.

Inland Taipan
This is the World's most dangerous terrestrial snake and is found in the Cooper Basin where they live in the cracked black soil. This species has been found as far south as near the junction of the Darling and Murray rivers. Food often comprises species of native rats. It is thought that the reason their venom is so toxic is that they cannot afford to grab one of these rats and hang on and afford to get bitten, so they have a strategy to get down a crack, snap strike at a rat and immediately retreat from potential conflict. The rat keels over very quickly and is readily eaten The Inland Taipan changes colour through the year. In winter it becomes extremely dark and in summer becomes a light tan colour. It is possible that the colour change is because dark objects are more efficient in absorbing heat which aids the process of thermo-regulation.

Some of the key reptile habitats around the Geelong area and some of the reptiles that live in them

1 Port Phillip Bay
Sea Turtles and **Yellow-bellied Sea Snakes** are more common in the tropics but also can be found in temperate zones like Port Phillip Bay. Sea Snakes are quite venomous, not very aggressive, are entirely aquatic and feed exclusively on fish.

2 Salt-marsh Vegetation
For example, Swan Bay Rd between St Leonards and Queenscliff

Representative species on the margins of the swamps are **Common Tiger Snakes, Brown Snakes** and some **Skink** species including **Blue Tongues** and **Jacky Dragons**. The limitations on the ability of a reptile to live in this type of habitat are that food in the form of frogs is limited by the presence of salt water. There is fresh water at times but is soon lost in the sandy soil. **Jacky Dragons** frequent the tops of bushes in the early morning sun and retreat under the bush during the day. The sandy soil is needed where eggs are laid and morning dew is a source of moisture for these dragons.

3 Under Sheets of Galvanised Iron
Reptiles are easy to find in these habitats where it is possible to find **Copperheads, Striped Skinks, Blotched and Common Blue Tongues, Brown Snakes and Tiger Snakes.** This habitat provides shelter, a dry environment; heat early in the day enables easy thermo-regulation. For **Blue Tongues** it is a habitat often rich in food in the form of snails. **Copperheads** are rarely found in the presence of other snakes because they prey on them. These snakes are mainly common around swampy areas where they mostly eat frogs. People rarely get bitten, but they are venomous.

4 Dry Sclerophyll Forest
For example, in the Brisbane Ranges. Typical habitat of grass trees and eucalypts. **Bougainville Skinks** can be found in leaf litter, in rotting logs and are possibly nocturnal. They are not helio-thermic. **White Skinks** are found in the forest region of water storages of the Brisbane Ranges.

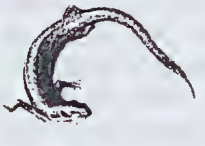
5 Granite Outcrops
Rock ledges like those of the You Yangs are a rich reptile habitat for **Brown Snakes, Little Whip Snakes, Striped Skinks, Jacky Dragons, Blue Tongues, Shinglebacks, Cunningham's Skinks** and **Black Rock Skinks. Tiger Snakes** are less common. Two weeks prior to giving this talk Ron observed near the turntable in the You Yangs two large **Eastern Brown Snakes** manipulating their body temperature in the hot sun by coiling on an exposed rock.

6 Native Grasslands
Near Little River for example, **Striped Legless Lizards** are very dependent on the cracking soils and the tussocks of grass in order to avoid predators and get at their food supply of small beetles and other insects. **Tree-line Skinks** sometimes have two or three tails after regrowth of tails lost to predators. These species are helio-thermic and bask on rocks in morning sun. **Brown Snakes** and **Tiger Snakes** are active predators in these grasslands. They increase their temperature in the early morning and then prey on Blue Tongues, other snakes and small mammals.

7 Rivers
The **Long-necked Turtle** is found in the Barwon River, Kororoit Creek and Yarra Valley etc. It is not known whether this species had occurred naturally because so many pets have been released. They are, however, well suited to these habitats.

8 Farmland
Remnants of these areas where there are rock piles and rock fences. Without these rocks, heavy grazing pressure would take away hiding places and access to insects, In drought conditions, vegetation cover would be eaten down to the ground. Other disturbed habitats which favour reptiles in country Victoria are discarded sheets of galvanised iron (as mentioned previously) and rubbish tips.

Dave King gave a vote of thanks to the speaker.



BIRD GROUP REPORT

19 February 2002

...Trevor Pescott

At the 19 February meeting, Valda Dedman, described in wonderful detail, the White-winged Chough.

Ornithologist John Gould wrote of the extreme tameness of the bird 'readily admitting a very close approach, and then merely flying off to the low branch of some neighbouring tree.

'During the pairing season the male becomes very animated, and his manners so remarkable that it would be necessary for my readers to witness the bird in its native wilds to form a just conception of them; while sitting on the same branch close to the female, he spreads out his wings and tail to the fullest extent, lowers his head, puffs out his feathers and displays himself too the utmost advantage, and when two or more are engaged in these evolutions, the exhibition cannot fail to amuse and delight the spectator. **A winged specimen gave more trouble than any other bird I have ever chased**; no power of passing over the ground being so great, that it bounded on before me and cleared every obstacle, hillocks and fallen trees, with the utmost facility.' (Gould 1865)

The White-winged Chough is black with all 10 primary wing feathers white edged with black. Adults have a deep red eye but this is not until the bird is four years old. Over that time the eye colour gradually changes from brown to orange then finally red.

The chough's beak is quite remarkable, black, long, thin and sharply down-curved. It is used as a pick to excavate to 20 cm in search for food, or occasionally prying insects from under bark.

The birds spend nearly all the time on the ground, walking in search of food. They forage as a group, and share any source of food that they find. They have a wide range of food items, from ants, beetles and other insects to frogs, fruit and grain.

Although they dig-over large areas, they never rake with their feet. The young take nearly a year to master the art of food-finding, and for at least eight months after fledging they rely on being fed by their parents and helpers.

Choughs live in groups of up to 20, the average seven — a single pair is not a viable group. The sex-ratio is even, and the group consists of at least one male and female more than four years old and a range of immatures of varying age from previous years.

One extraordinary feature of choughs is that of kidnapping — a fledgling dependent on food from older birds in its group may be 'stolen' by adults of a neighbouring group, lured away with the offer of food.

Choughs build a large, mud 'basin' nest usually on horizontal limbs from eight to 13 m above the ground. Rarely the nest is placed on top of a stick nest of another bird; more often old chough nests are used by other birds.

The nest is built in stages, each after the earlier level of mud has dried. These stages are revealed in grooves in the side of the nest. It takes about a week for the nest to be completed.

Nesting is a communal task, with all members of the group helping to build the nest. More than one female may lay in the same nest, and the usual clutch is from 3–5 eggs. Incubation, which takes 20 days, begins after the first egg is laid, so they hatch in succession. The first young is several days older than the youngest, and consequently gets a larger proportion of the food brought to the nest.

The young stay in the nest for up to 28 days, then flutter to the ground before they can fly. For the next week the young run after the group begging food, and when danger threatens they either scramble up a sloping trunk and hop from branch to branch, or 'freeze' motionless on the ground.

All members of the group feed nestlings and fledglings, but there are times when the bird bringing food false-feeds or 'cheats' — offering the food to the young, then eating it! If the bird is seen by other members of the group to do this, it is subjected to a display or 'punishment'.

The calls of the bird consist of two main types, a harsh alarm note and a softer piping whistle. Gould wrote (1865) 'on being disturbed (it) generally utters a harsh grating disagreeable and tart note; at other times ... it makes the woods ring with its peculiar soft, low, very pleasing but mournful note.'

Choughs apparently enjoy excellent eyesight, as Roy Wheeler wrote — 'One day, whilst watching them feeding in a nearby paddock, one gave an alarm and they all flew across the road into the house block trees. I couldn't see anything to alarm them until I swept the paddock with field glasses and there, at least half a mile away, was a fox sneaking along a fence.' (*Vic. Nat.* Aug. 1964)

The distribution of the chough is mainly eastern Australia. Around Geelong, Charles Belcher (1914) records them at Lethbridge, Anakie, You Yangs, near Ocean Grove, Anglesea and Airey's Inlet, while H.E. Hill (1898) records them around Lorne.

Now, there is some doubt about their survival in the Eastern Otways — we do need more reports of the chough from these areas.

The speaker at the next Bird Group will be Margaret Cameron and her subject will be 'Birding in Ecuador'.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS FOR FEBRUARY 2002

... compiled by Rob Ganly and Marilyn Hewish

We have just completed yet another Wader Count, and even though the counts have been going on for more than 20 years, they have not become the least bit boring. They produce not only important information for research and conservation, but also unusual and exciting records, a first-hand appreciation of our wonderful wetlands, and some memorable experiences with deep mud and gale-force winds (thank-you, all intrepid counters). The Red-necked Phalarope discovered at Hospital Swamp by Craig Morley and John Newman was a highlight, and has proved an attraction for many bird-watchers from Geelong and further afield. 54 Red-kneed Dotterels and 9 Glossy Ibis at Hospital Swamp must have been quite a sight (what a count Craig and John had!), as must 140 Eastern Curlews on Swan Bay. And if the trend continues we will soon be knee-deep in Banded Stilts. Other birds seen by counters were Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos feeding a young bird (an unusual observation in recent years, see the *Geelong Bird Report 2000* for details), Grey-tailed Tattlers, Black-tailed Godwits, Little Terns, lots of Great Crested Grebes and Little Egrets. We are still seeing Black-tailed Native Hens – this irruption has been in progress since late 2000. Moving away from the wetland and waterbird theme, the Rufous Bristlebirds at Point Addis are still friendly and come in close for a chat, and records of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos are still coming in regularly. Keep a watch out for the first of the larger flocks that arrive in Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula in autumn and winter. We don't have room in the Geelong Naturalist to print all the records submitted, but they have been entered into the database for the *Geelong Bird Report.* Thank-you all.

Observers were: (BAt) Bryant Attwood, (CMo) Craig Morley, (DK) Dave King, (GB) Grant Baverstock, (GMc) Gordon McCarthy, (IL) Ian Lyon, (JN) John Newman, (KC) Kay Campbell, (LP) Lorraine Preston, (LS) Lily Sherwood, (MHe) Marilyn Hewish, (RBa) Ray Baverstock, (RG) Rob Ganly, (RP) Rob Preston, (SL) Sue Longmore.

Species	No.	Date	Comments	Observer
Blue-billed Duck	2 pairs	2.02.02	Lake Lorne	DK
	1 M, 1 F	3.02.02	Lake Victoria. First record here	MHe
	100	10.02.02	Freshwater Lake	MHe
Hoary-headed Grebe	200	Dec.01	Freshwater Lake	MHe
	300 – 350	10.02.02	Freshwater Lake	MHe
Great Crested Grebe	14	3.02.02	Lake Victoria: 3 diving	MHe
	27	23.01.02	Avalon Beach: 12 on bay, 15 on lagoon	RG
Little Egret	17	10.02.02	Lake Victoria: in one flock	MHe, SL
Glossy Ibis	9	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp	CMo, JN
Spotted Harrier	1	27.01.02	Balliang: attacked & driven off prey by Brown Falcon	MHe
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	13.02.02	Fyansford Common	RG
Little Eagle	1	20.01.02	Buckley Falls: on ground	Bat
	1	18.02.02	Buckley Falls, escorted by Sulphur-crested Cockatoos	Bat
Australian Spotted Crake	6	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp	CMo, JN
	4	24.01.02	Avalon Saltworks	RG
Black-tailed Native-hen	2	2.02.02	Lake Lorne	DK
Latham's Snipe	18	9.01.02	Point Henry	RG
	14	2.02.02	Lake Lorne	DK
	28	23.01.02	Avalon Saltworks	RG
Black-tailed Godwit	3	4.02.02	Hospital Swamp	KC, RG
	5	6.02.02	Hospital Swamp	RG
Eastern Curlew	140	10.02.02	Swan Bay West: flew towards Lake Victoria	RG
Marsh Sandpiper	118	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp	CMo, JN
Red-necked Phalarope	1	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp: with Red-necked Stints restless, feeding actively, observed spinning once. Full report submitted.	CMo, JN
Red-necked Stint	1800+	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp	CMo, JN
Banded Stilt	810	7.02.02	St Leonards Salt Lagoon. Numbers rising since December	MHe
	2000	10.02.02	Lake Victoria. Numbers rising since December	MHe, SL
	2300	10.02.02	Moolap Saltworks	Wader counters
Red-necked Avocet	1000+	10.02.02	Moolap Saltworks	BAt
	40+	17.02.02	Moolap Saltworks	BAt
Hooded Plover	5	3.02.02	Lake Victoria	MHe
Red-kneed Dotterel	54+	2.02.02	Hospital Swamp, on muddy margins	CMo, JN
Little Tern	7	10.02.02	Lake Victoria: diving & feeding, resting on island	MHe, SL
Crested Pigeon	2	12.02.02	Werribee Plains	IL

...continued on page 14

Species	No.	Date	Comments	Observer
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	7	3.02.02	Lake Victoria: including one begging young fed by adult	MHe
	2	31.12.01	Highton: flying south	RBa
	6+	31.01.02	Near Rokewood, flying west	GB, RBa
	3	8.12.01	Belmont: flying northeast	RP
	4	11.12.01	Anglesea: flying west	RP
	2	18.02.02	Inverleigh: flying east	RG
	35	18.02.02	Stonehaven	RG
	2	7.01.02	Moggs Creek: flying west	RP
Gang-gang Cockatoo	4	13.02.02	Newtown	RG
Rainbow Lorikeet	5	6.02.02	Highton: low numbers fly over daily throughout year	RBa
	12+	19.02.02	Highton: flying south	RBa
Musk Lorikeet	flock	5–13.02.02	Highton: heard feeding in eucalyptus for 8 days	RBa
Little Lorikeet	2	4–6.02.02	Highton: flying over	RBa
Kookaburra	1	18.02.02	Belmont Council Depot: first sighting in area	RP
Rufous Bristlebird	1	21.01.02	Point Addis	LP, RP, LS
Yellow Thornbill	2	11.01.02	Highton: also on 25.01, 28.01& 17.01	RBa
Little Wattlebird	1	30.01.02	Breamlea township	GMc
Grey Butcherbird	3	9.01.02	Highton: regular visitors over many years	RBa
Pied Currawong	2+	All Jan 02	Highton. On 7.02, large flock moved in: larger flock normally arrive in Autumn	RBa
Common Blackbird	2	13.02.02	Highton: feeding in garden at dusk	RBa
Common Starling	2	19.02.02	Highton: imitating Rainbow Lorikeet calls	RBa

GLUEPOT RESERVE VOLUNTEER RANGERS

There is a wonderful opportunity to become involved in the operation of an internationally important conservation reserve and to experience its very special environment. Birds Australia is looking for expressions of interest from people who would like to become Volunteer Rangers at the reserve, 64 km north of Waikerie in SA's Riverland district.

Volunteer Rangers will be required to undertake a small number of key maintenance tasks and a variety of other optional jobs. Rangers also have the opportunity to work on research projects conducted by the Reserve and outside research institutions. Couples are welcome to apply. The position is booked until the end of May 2003 due to strong demand, but expressions of interest for the remainder of 2003 and 2004 will be most welcome. Ideally, rangers should be prepared to stay for two months or more and preference will be given to those who are comfortable in the bush, able to communicate with the public and have a strong natural history interest. Accommodation is provided as well as a food allowance and 4WD for use on the reserve. The Reserve also runs an Assistant Ranger program and acceptance is dependent on availability of bedroom accommodation.

If you are interested, please obtain details and a copy of the duty statement from Duncan MacKenzie, 4 Edinburgh Ave, Stonyfell 5066, Ph. (08) 8332 1204, Fax (08) 8364 5527, email <dmackenzie@iname.com>. Applicants need to supply details of relevant experience, time of availability and a referee's phone number.

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Geelong Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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The Meeting Room behind the big hall at Clairvaux Catholic School, Reynolds Road, Belmont.
Use the driveway between the big hall and the playing field.

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